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ABSTRACT

This document contains two brief guides intended to provide teachers and parents with basic information and practical help in working with children with attention deficit disorders. In the first guide, attention deficit disorder is defined and the subtypes of undifferentiated attention deficit disorder (ADD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are differentiated. Fourteen characteristics of ADHD are listed. Multidisciplinary evaluation is recommended for diagnosis and five frequently used rating scales listed. Two support organizations are identified. The second guide examines the ADD/ADHD student and homework. It covers these students' areas of difficulty, needs (e.g., more frequent feedback or consequences), considerations for teachers (such as the provision of feedback as soon as possible), suggestions for parents (e.g., parental supervision of homework), and some general homework suggestions (including ensuring that homework has a clear purpose). (13 references) (DB)

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Attention Deficit Disorders: A Guide for Teachers

[and]

The ADD/ADHD Student and Homework

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ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS
A Guide for Teachers

DEFINING ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDERS

Attention Deficit Disorder is a disorder which is characterized by serious and persistent difficulties in three specific areas:

1. Attention Span
2. Impulse Control
3. Hyperactivity (sometimes)

ADD is a chronic disorder which can begin in infancy and can extend through adulthood while having negative effects on a child's life at home, school, and within his or her community. It is conservatively estimated that 3-5% of our school-age population is affected by ADD. There are two types of attention deficits, both of which are described below.

Undifferentiated Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)

In this form of ADD the primary and most significant characteristic is inattentiveness; hyperactivity is NOT present. Nevertheless, these children still manifest problems with organization and distractibility and they may be seen as quiet or passive in nature. It is speculated that undifferentiated ADD is currently underdiagnosed as these children tend to be overlooked more easily in the classroom. Thus, these children may be at a higher risk for academic failure than those with ADHD.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

According to the criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III-R) of the American Psychiatric Association, to diagnose a child as having ADHD he or she must display at least eight of the following characteristics before the age of 7. These behaviors must be at considerably greater frequency than observed for most other people of the same mental age. The disturbance must have been ongoing for at least six (6) months.

Characteristics*:

1. Fidgets, squirms, or seems restless
2. Has difficulty remaining seated
3. Is easily distracted
4. Has difficulty awaiting turn in games or group situations
5. Often blurts out answer before question has been completed
6. Has difficulty following through on instructions from others
7. Has difficulty sustaining attention in task or play activities
8. Shifts from one uncompleted task to another
9. Has difficulty playing quietly
10. Often talks excessively

11. Interrupts or intrudes on others
12. Doesn't seem to be listening to what is being said to him/her
13. Often loses things necessary for tasks at school or at home
14. Often engages in physically dangerous actions without considering possible consequences (not for the purpose of thrill-seeking).
(* from American Psychiatric Association, 1987, pp. 52-53)

(Adapted from: "Attention Deficit Disorders: A Guide for Teachers", Education Committee of C.H.A.D.D., November, 1988.)

DIAGNOSING ATTENTION DEFICIT DISORDER

A Diagnosis of attention deficit should only be made after ruling out other factors related to medical, emotional, or environmental variables which could cause similar symptoms. A multidisciplinary evaluation should be conducted including:

- -- medical evaluation
- -- psychological testing
- -- educational testing
- -- speech and language assessment
- -- neurological evaluation
- -- teacher input (including rating scale)
- -- parent input (including rating scale)

Frequently Used Rating Scales for Parents and Teachers:

Conners Rating Scales (Conners, 1969; Goyette, Conners & Ulrich, 1978).

Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (Quay & Peterson, 1983).

Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983).

Yale Children's Inventory (Shaywitz, Schnell, Shaywitz, & Towle, 1986).

ADD-H Comprehensive Teacher Rating Scale (Ullmann, Sleator, & Sprague, 1984).

Resources:

Support Organizations
(Both organizations will provide information for starting a support group in your area.)

Attention Deficit Disorder Association (ADDA)
8901 South Ireland Way
Aurora, CO 80016
(800) 487-2282

Children with Attention Deficit Disorders (C.H.A.D.D.)
1859 North Pine Island Road, Suite 185
Plantation, FL 33322
(305) 587-3700

THE ADD/ADHD STUDENT AND HOMEWORK

It is not difficult to see why homework completion presents quite a challenge to the ADD or the ADHD student.

For instance, ADD/ADHD students tend to have difficulty in the following situations:

1. When the task is mundane, laborious, or boring
2. When other stimuli are present
3. When feedback is delayed, sporadic, or not given
4. When consequences aren't clearly stated, or maintained
5. When following general and specific rules

In addition, ADD/ADHD students need:

1. Help paying attention to the assigned task. (supervision)
2. More powerful consequences. (discipline)
3. More frequent feedback or consequences. (reward/punishment)

TEACHERS WILL WANT TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING WHEN ASSIGNING HOMEWORK TO THE ADD OR ADHD STUDENT:

1. The type of assignment this student needs and can handle
2. The length of the assignment given the attention characteristics of this student
3. The provision of feedback as soon as possible
4. The consequences and rewards this student needs
5. The development of a working relationship with the parents
6. The effect homework has in the home. If homework issues are causing major problems at home please consider reducing or eliminating some assignments. How else might you reach the objectives with the student?
7. If "responsibility" is a goal of your homework assignments, consider using non-academic tasks to achieve this goal.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS:

1. Since ADD and ADHD students often have trouble with school, don't greet your child each afternoon with "How did school go today?" Don't begin your interaction with a grilling about homework assignments. Instead, pick a specific aspect of the child's day, or discuss another unrelated activity or event.
2. For this child, parental supervision is needed where homework is concerned. Set a specific time and place for homework. It should be free of distractions; the child's room is often NOT a good place to complete homework. Meet with the teacher to set up workable guidelines.
3. Homework should be broken into very short segments. It would be helpful if you set time limits for specific sections of the assignment.
4. Specific rewards and consequences must be established and clear to the child. Feedback must be given immediately. Stick to your plan.
5. The supervision of homework should not be left up to one parent if the child lives with two adults. The rules and consequences, however, must be the same.
6. If homework is upsetting your household, meet with the teacher or counselor to discuss options.

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Sullivan's General Homework Suggestions:

- -- the purpose(s) of homework should be clear to all
- -- assignments should be well planned and related to class lessons
- -- teachers should determine whether they are grading students on "compliance" issues related to homework
- -- if homework is given remember to collect it, respond to it, and return it promptly
- -- determine what should be done if a student is unable or unwilling to do the homework
- -- do not assume parents are able/willing to help students with their homework
- -- schools (and districts) should establish written homework policies with the input of parents

A Final Word. . . . .

Many homework assignments are all that promote failure for ADD and ADHD students: mundane, laborious, and boring. Let's change that for ALL students.

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